



July 7, 2021

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister LaGrange,

Charter School Application Process and Implications

In light of the changes to legislation and processes related to charter school applications, we wish to share concerns regarding the overall charter school application process, implications for provincial funding, and associated ramifications upon school jurisdiction facility management responsibilities.

As defined on the Alberta Education website (<https://www.alberta.ca/charter-schools.aspx>), charter schools are autonomous non-profit public schools that:

- provide basic education in a different or enhanced way;
- follow Alberta's programs of study (curriculum);
- have a focus not already offered by the board of the school authority in which the charter schools are located. This could include unique:
 - learning styles
 - teaching styles
 - approaches
 - philosophies
 - pedagogies
- demonstrate collaboration or engagement with a post-secondary institution or a school authority; and
- have the potential to improve the education system as a whole and enhance education research and innovation.

Currently, when receiving the notice of charter school applications from Alberta Education, limited information or evidence is included regarding the intent or design of the application. Section 3(1) of *Charter Schools Regulation* states that the Minister of Education will “consider any information received from any board of a public or separate school division, Francophone regional authority or charter school that receives notice under section 24 of the Act, including information about any alternative programs that currently exist in the geographic area.” Greater detail around the proposed program is required in order to provide a comprehensive response to adequately assess whether programming described already exists. In the absence of this detailed feedback from school authorities, it would seem challenging for the Ministry to conduct a thorough review to confirm if indeed the application meets the criteria for approval. This challenge is further amplified by how in the most recent experience of the Calgary Board of Education and Calgary Catholic School District the

timeframe set for each school authority to respond was only two weeks. Such a short period of time, coupled with extremely limited details around the proposed charter school, is a barrier to providing quality feedback.

We recognize the intention of government to provide a broad range of choice to families in the design of education. We remain committed to the provision of robust programming in the context of school jurisdictions and leveraging the effective and efficient use of provincial funding within existing systems. The increase of charter schools outside of school jurisdictions raises valid concerns regarding the province's ability to fully maximize funds in support of all students.

The Metro Boards agree that families deserve a variety of choices for their children's education - that is why we are proud of our ongoing commitment to offer our students a variety of programs. Our public schools are inclusive, offer programming designed to meet particular student needs and interests, and accommodate everyone.

Resource challenges include the need for school jurisdictions to manage the facilities leased by charter schools. School jurisdictions are limited to charging a \$1 per year lease rate and a capped board and system administration grant. Accordingly, as the number of charter schools leasing a school jurisdiction's facilities grows, the resource pressures upon that school jurisdiction also grow as a larger percentage of its limited board and system administration funding must be directed away from public schools towards charter schools.

The Metro Boards are committed to exploring with Alberta Education possibilities that can continue to support the focus of providing students and parents with choice in education within the publicly funded system. Accordingly, we propose that our respective staff initiate a working group in partnership with your Ministry to review the charter school application process in an effort to provide valuable and comprehensive feedback from school divisions most affected by new charter schools.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Marilyn Dennis
Chair, Board of Trustees
Calgary Board of Education



Mary Martin
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Sandra Palazzo
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